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## The earliest Syriac literature

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Although Jesus and his apostles undoubtedly used Aramaic as their main language of communication, nevertheless we know singularly little about the early spread of Christianity among the Aramaic-speaking population of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire (covering approximately modern SE Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel) and of the Parthian Empire further east. In view of this lack of information particular interest is attached to the earliest surviving Syriac literature, most of it belonging to the third and fourth centuries, since this offers the best evidence for the distinctive character of Aramaic-speaking Christianity in a milieu that was for the most part still comparatively unHellenized.

It is likely that some time before the end of the second century AD a large proportion of Aramaic-speaking Christians came to adopt as their literary language the local Aramaic dialect of Edessa, known today as Syriac. Inscriptions in this dialect, which has its own distinctive script, are already known from the first century AD, and from the mid-third century there survive three legal documents from Edessa (modern Urfa in SE Turkey) and its vicinity. As will be seen, it is likely that Syriac had already been adopted as a literary language by local Jews as well as by pagans before it was taken up by Aramaic-speaking Christians.

The origins of Christianity in Edessa are unfortunately shrouded in obscurity, and with one exception (Bardaisan), it is not until the fourth century (by which time Christianity was well established in the area) that we begin to have any clear evidence. According to a local tradition already in circulation c. 300, and recorded by Eusebius (*HE* 1.13.6–22), Abgar the Black, the king of Edessa and its surrounding territory, having heard of Jesus' miracles, had sent a letter to him, asking him to come and heal him of an illness. In his reply, Jesus promised to send one of his disciples after his ascension. Once this had taken place Judas 'who is also Thomas' sent Thaddaeus, one of the Seventy, who duly healed him and preached the gospel in Edessa. Eusebius claims to

have translated the text from Syriac, and indeed the legend also comes down to us in a much expanded form in Syriac, in a work known as the Teaching (or Doctrine) of Addai (Addai being the Syriac equivalent of Thaddaeus).<sup>1</sup> This work, which belongs to the early decades of the fifth century, is more interesting for the light it sheds on Edessene Christianity of that time than for any reliable information it can give of the origins of Christianity in Edessa.

Modern scholars have taken basically two very different approaches to this legend (which obviously reflects the general search for apostolic origins, characteristic of the fourth century). Some would dismiss it totally,<sup>2</sup> while others prefer to see it as a retrojection into the first century of the conversion of the local king at the end of the second century:<sup>3</sup> in other words, Abgar (V) the Black of the legend in fact represents Abgar (VIII) the Great (c. 177–212), contemporary of Bardaisan. Attractive though this second approach might seem, there are serious objections to it, and the various small supportive pieces of evidence that Abgar VIII became Christian disappear on closer examination.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the wiser course is to acknowledge that the Thaddaeus/Addai legend can tell us nothing about the origins of Christianity in Edessa, and to turn to the single early Christian writer of Edessa whose name we know and who is definitely a historical figure, namely Bardaisan.

Bardaisan (154–222) frequented the court of Abgar VIII (where Julius Africanus met him) and had evidently received a good education in Greek culture, even though he wrote only in Syriac. Known as ‘the Aramaean philosopher’, he had a speculative mind and was well versed in current trends in Greek philosophy. Since his views on certain topics, such as creation, did not conform to what subsequently emerged as orthodox Christian teaching, later writers regarded him as a heretic, some associating him with Valentinian doctrine, while others (among them, Ephrem) saw him as providing the basis for Mani’s teaching. Since one result of this later condemnation of his views was the loss of his writings, his teaching has to be reconstructed on the unsatisfactory basis of the biased reports of the heresiographical tradition.<sup>5</sup> We know from Ephrem, however, that one of the vehicles for his teaching was poetry, thus making him the earliest representative of one of the most distinctive features of Syriac literature of the patristic period, namely the use of verse as a medium for theology. The particular genre he used was the stanzaic *madrasha*, conventionally (but not very satisfactorily) translated ‘hymn’, which was also the one which Ephrem himself used to such great effect.

One extant work, of a very different nature, is often ascribed to Bardaisan: *The Laws of the Countries*.<sup>6</sup> This short book, a discussion on free will known to (and quoted by) Eusebius in a Greek translation under the title of *Dialogue on*

*Fate* (*PrEv.* 6.10.1–48),<sup>7</sup> is in fact the product of one of his disciples. Significantly, it takes the form of a philosophical dialogue, whose opening words – ‘A few days ago we went up to visit our brother Shemeshgram. Bardaisan came and found us there . . . and he asked us, “What were you talking about . . . ?”’ – deliberately reflect the beginning of a Platonic dialogue. This work thus introduces into Syriac literature a genre which was specifically Greek in character. Bardaisan and his followers provide an excellent example of the way in which a local Aramaic culture came to be Hellenized: philosophical and theological ideas that were current in the contemporary Greek-speaking world were introduced into Syriac on two different levels, the first using what will certainly have been a native Syriac genre, the verse *madrasha*, no doubt aimed at a wider audience, and the second introducing a Greek literary genre, probably intended for a smaller and highly educated group of readers.

A passage in *The Laws of the Countries* implies that Christianity had spread fairly widely in the East by the first half of the third century, and it is virtually certain that by that time much of both the Old and the New Testament would have been available in Syriac translation. Although there is nothing that specifically links the earliest Syriac biblical translations to Edessa, the fact that the dialect of Aramaic used was known in antiquity as ‘Edessene’ strongly suggests that they must belong to this general area. The Syriac Old Testament, known as the Peshitta, is definitely a translation directly from Hebrew, and the earliest books to be translated (no doubt the Pentateuch among them) probably go back to the second century AD, thus almost certainly constituting the earliest surviving monument of Syriac literature. The question of whether the Peshitta Old Testament was the work of Jews or of Christians has been long disputed. One thing, however, is certain: as in the case of the Septuagint, different books were translated by different people and at different times. It is in fact very likely that the earliest translations were the work, not of Christians, but of Jews from the Edessa region;<sup>8</sup> this is suggested by, among other things, the presence both of a number of exegetical translation traditions that are closely paralleled in rabbinic literature, and of certain phraseology such as ‘he spoke before God’ or ‘God was revealed over him’, characteristic of the Targum tradition. If some other later books of the Syriac Old Testament were translated by Christians, then these Christians will have had a knowledge of Hebrew quite exceptional in the early Church, and this suggests that they may well have been converts from Judaism, or that they came from a Christian community that still maintained close ties with its Jewish roots.

Such a scenario may shed light on the controversy among scholars over the character of earliest Syriac Christianity: was the background of the earliest

Christian mission to this area still deeply rooted in Judaism (as the Addai legend implies)? Or was it of predominantly Gentile background, as the Greek orientation of Bardaisan's teaching seems to suggest?<sup>9</sup> Those who reject the idea of any historicity lurking behind the Addai legend have normally opted for the second position, but this leaves the indirect evidence provided by the case of the Peshitta Old Testament without any satisfactory explanation. Probably it is better to suppose the existence of two different strands present in earliest Syriac Christianity, one with a pagan background and a Hellenizing orientation, and the other with background and orientation both Jewish. It would be tempting to go on and suppose that these two streams represent two different strata within Edessene society: since the former is inevitably linked with Bardaisan, it is likely to have been associated with the Hellenized upper classes, while the latter would then have been characteristic of the less Hellenized strata of society.<sup>10</sup>

Some further light on this matter is thrown by the earliest Syriac translations of books of the New Testament. It is now generally accepted that the earliest form of the Gospels in Syriac was the *Diatessaron*, or Harmony of the Four Gospels associated with the name of Tatian, and this remained in current use into the first half of the fifth century, when a successful policy of suppressing it was carried out. But was the Syriac *Diatessaron* (lost now apart from quotations) identical with Tatian's *Diatessaron*, and if so, did he compose it in Syriac, or was it translated from Greek? And if it was written in Syriac, how is this to be related to the western *Diatessaron* tradition in Latin and medieval vernacular languages? Also, to what extent did Tatian introduce encratite features, or make use of other sources besides the four Gospels?<sup>11</sup> All these questions remain matters of uncertainty and dispute; what is certain, however, is that the Syriac *Diatessaron* exercised a considerable influence on early Syriac writers and a commentary on it, attributed to Ephrem, survives, providing us with the best direct evidence for its readings. It is also likely that the Syriac *Diatessaron* was responsible for many of the harmonizing readings to be found in the earliest Syriac translation of the separate four Gospels, known as the Old Syriac and preserved (in slightly different forms) in two early manuscripts (the *Sinaiticus* and *Curetonianus*). Though various dates have been suggested for the Old Syriac translation of the Gospels,<sup>12</sup> ranging from the second to the early fourth century, it is perhaps most likely that it belongs to the early third. Two features deserve special mention here. In the first place, it is significant that, perhaps already in the *Diatessaron* but definitely in the Old Syriac, Old Testament quotations in the Greek Gospels have often been adapted to the wording they have in the Peshitta Old Testament;<sup>13</sup> this not only provides a useful *terminus*

*ante quem* for the translation of particular Old Testament books into Syriac, but it also indicates that, for the community for whom the translation was made, the Peshitta Old Testament had greater authority in this matter than the wording of the Greek New Testament. Secondly, certain features in the terminology and phraseology used in the Old Syriac Gospels strongly point to a milieu that has its roots in Judaism; thus, for example, for 'the Law', Greek νόμος is not simply transliterated *nāmōsā*, as later became the standard practice, but is frequently rendered by *'urāytā*, the normal term in Jewish Aramaic. Similarly, we here and there encounter in the Old Syriac Gospels phraseology which is characteristic of the Targum tradition: thus at Luke 1:13 where in the Greek the angel tells Zacharias 'Your prayer has been heard', the Old Syriac provides 'Behold, God has heard the voice of your prayer', using a phrase which occurs a number of times in the Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch (e.g., Neofiti at Gen. 30:17), but never in the Peshitta Old Testament. Features such as these cannot have arisen in a Christian community whose sole origin lay in a mission that was wholly or predominantly Gentile in orientation.<sup>14</sup>

Like many early translations from Greek into Syriac, the Old Syriac Gospels are in places a fairly free rendering; furthermore, it had been made from an early form of the Greek text that subsequently fell out of use, to be replaced, in the Syrian area, by a precursor of the standard Byzantine *textus receptus*. Accordingly it is hardly surprising that in due course it was felt necessary to bring the Old Syriac closer into line with the Greek. This process was at first a gradual one, and traces of it can already be seen in the two surviving Old Syriac manuscripts; some time around the beginning of the fifth century, however, a particular (rather inconsistently) revised text<sup>15</sup> was so successfully promoted that it rapidly became the standard Syriac New Testament text, known today as the Peshitta. Besides the Gospels the Peshitta covers Acts, the Pauline Epistles, and part of the Catholic Epistles (James, 1 Peter, 1 John; the remaining books, which did not form part of the Syriac canon, were not translated into Syriac until the sixth century). Although no Old Syriac manuscript of these books survives, quotations in early writers suggest that there must have been an Old Syriac version, though it may not have differed as noticeably as is the case in the Gospels from the Peshitta revision. Among the Pauline Epistles read in this lost Old Syriac version was 3 Corinthians.

Two very important monuments of early Syriac literature almost certainly belong to the second and third centuries, and both have often been associated with Edessa, though again it is only the fact that they are written in Edessene Aramaic (i.e. Syriac) which can offer any real evidence in support of this, and here it must be recalled that, once Syriac had been adopted as the literary

language of Aramaic-speaking Christianity, its use will have rapidly spread to other areas as well.

The forty-two *Odes of Solomon* constitute a unique document of early Christian literature.<sup>16</sup> These short lyric poems vividly express the joy of an intimate relationship between the Odist and Christ:

As the sun brings joy to those who await the day,  
so is the Lord my joy,  
for He is my Sun,  
His beams have raised me up;  
His light has dispelled all the darkness from my face.  
(Ode 15:1-2)

Though some odes are straightforward and offer no particular problems of interpretation, many are highly allusive and employ striking imagery, while a small number remain extremely obscure (e.g. 38) and have defied any satisfactory explanation. Direct biblical references are absent, but numerous possible allusions can be identified. Even the association with Solomon remains unclear: is it simply due to the fact that the odes were evidently often transmitted together with the Psalms of Solomon (of very different character), or does the name reflect a deliberate choice on the part of the unknown author? In the light of this it is perhaps not surprising that date, background and original language all remain uncertain and matters of dispute.

For some, the *Odes* go back to the late first century, emanate from Johannine circles, and have some links with Qumran literature (*Ode* 5 opens, as do some of the *Hodayot*, with the words 'I give thanks to You, Lord'); others see them as originating in the kind of Valentinian milieu that produced the *Gospel of Truth*; others again have seen in them polemic aimed against Marcionite and even Manichaean teaching (this last would mean that their date is to be lowered at least to the late third century); yet others have read them as early baptismal hymns. None of these positions carries full conviction, but there is something to be said for seeing the *Odes* as expressing the joy felt at the experience of the realization of what baptism signifies; furthermore, if the phrase 'without envy', used no less than seven times of God, is indeed aimed against Marcionite teaching (known to have been present in Syria), then this places the *Odes* at least in the second half of the second century. A late second-century date would also suit the notable parallels to be found in Clement of Alexandria for the striking feminine imagery used of God in *Ode* 19, where 'the Son is the cup (of milk), and the Father is He who was milked, and the Holy Spirit is She who milked Him'.<sup>17</sup>

The *Odes* survive almost complete in Syriac, but one ode (11) is known in Greek, and five in Coptic (incorporated into the gnostic *Pistis Sophia*); there is also a quotation in Latin by Lactantius. All of this indicates that the *Odes* must once have circulated quite widely, but in what language were they originally written? Inconclusive arguments have been adduced both for Greek and for Syriac; another, though perhaps remote, possibility is that they were originally written in some other Aramaic dialect (or even Hebrew). While most scholars at present favour Syriac, it remains puzzling that they are not written in any recognizable Syriac poetic form, yet they are clearly intended as poetry. Although the more complete of the two surviving Syriac manuscripts dates from as late as the fifteenth century, only a few possible allusions to them can be found in the works of Ephrem, while no traces at all in the rich Syriac liturgical tradition have ever been located.

By far the most extensive piece of early Syriac literature is the narrative concerning the Apostle Thomas's journey to, and time in, India, known as the *Acts of Thomas*<sup>18</sup> (the apostle is in fact always referred to as Judas Thomas, or Judas the Twin, *sc.* of Jesus). Unlike most of the other apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, the *Acts of Thomas* were composed in Syriac, and not in Greek; an early Greek translation, however, survives and this happens to preserve some archaic features which have been removed in the surviving form of the Syriac text. The work is usually dated to the early third century and has often been associated with Edessa, though there are no strong reasons to support this and Edessa never receives a single mention. The work, which is divided into 14 Πράξεις, or 'Acts' (the last of which concerns the martyrdom of Judas Thomas), belongs to the Hellenistic Greek literary genre of the 'Romance'. This genre had already been taken over in Judaism and adapted as a vehicle for religious teaching in the *Romance of Joseph and Aseneth*, and the *Acts of Thomas* likewise will have been aimed at imparting a religious message. It would seem that the prime aim of the book was to promote the ideal of an encratite lifestyle: thus both Judas Thomas and the women and men whom he converts are presented as models of chastity, for whom profane marriage (but not necessarily the institution of marriage itself) is something to be abhorred and rejected. It was no doubt this encratite aspect of the *Acts of Thomas* that made them also popular in Manichaean circles.

It seems likely that the intended readership of the *Acts* was expected to pick up various latent typological hints, in particular the parallel between Judas Thomas, sold by Jesus, his 'twin', to a merchant in order to go to preach in India, and Joseph (another model of chastity), sold by his brothers to end up in Egypt where in due course he rose to a position of authority. The *Acts of Thomas*

in fact serves as a major source for our knowledge of early Syriac theology; furthermore, the various descriptions of baptisms (chs 27, 121, 132, 157), often with accompanying prayers, are of great importance for an understanding of the early Syriac baptismal tradition.

Incorporated into the *Acts of Thomas* are two earlier allegorical hymns in (it seems) a six-syllable metre, on the Bride of Light (chs 6–7), and the famous Hymn of the Pearl (or Soul; chs 108–13), whose origins and significance have been the subject of much debate:<sup>19</sup> the main characters in the narrative poem – the king and queen of the East, the prince their son who is sent to Egypt to rescue a pearl that is guarded by a dragon, and the prince's double who meets him on his return – can all be interpreted in several different ways. Some have claimed the hymn as a pre-Christian witness to an otherwise unknown Iranian form of gnosticism, but on the whole a Christian origin seems more likely. In any case, it is clear that the East represents the heavenly realms, and Egypt the world: a correlation which must depend ultimately on the biblical narrative of Genesis and Exodus. The triad, king, queen and prince, reminiscent of the divine triad 'our lord, our lady, and the son of our lord and lady', found in inscriptions at Hatra, may well represent the Christian Trinity (and was certainly understood as such by later Christian readers); if this is correct, then the prince, who is both saviour and in need of being saved (before he can rescue the pearl, which probably represents the soul), is best understood as representing both First Adam and Second Adam: such a close identification of the two Adams can in fact be paralleled elsewhere, above all in the Ps.-Clementine literature. Many of the other details, however, remain problematic, and no modern interpretation provides a satisfactory explanation of everything.

The appellation 'Judas Thomas' also occurs in a few of the Coptic texts from Nag Hammadi, notably the *Gospel of Thomas*. This has (no doubt correctly) been taken as an indication of Syrian provenance, though whether any of these works had originally been written in Syriac or some related Aramaic dialect remains a matter of conjecture.

A few further early Syriac texts survive, notably a letter of a certain Mara to his son Serapion, and some Apologies. In the *Letter of Mara*,<sup>20</sup> Mara is portrayed as being from Samosata by origin, but at the time of writing he appears to be a captive in Seleucia; in the course of his Letter he gives various counsels of advice, of a generally Stoic nature, to his son, warning him of the vanity of the world. At one point mention is made of the Jews, who killed 'their wise king', as a result of which their city Jerusalem was sacked. It is known that captives were taken from Samosata by the Parthians in 72 and 161/2, and by the Sasanians in 256, and the Letter has been associated with each of these by modern scholars.



The question of date is an important one, since the Letter quotes a snatch of poetry, which may thus represent the earliest example of isosyllabic poetry in Syriac. The early date and the pagan authorship of the Letter have, however, been convincingly challenged, on the grounds that the linking of the death of Jesus with the destruction of Jerusalem is an essentially Christian motif, and one that only came into currency in the post-Constantinian period. Accordingly the Letter should be seen as the work of a Christian posing as a pagan; this in itself is interesting, for it points to the existence of a phenomenon not hitherto known from early Syriac writings, but familiar from Greek Christian ones.

Three early texts in Syriac belong to the genre of the Apology: since two of these are definitely translations from Greek, they are of only marginal interest here. The *Apology of Aristides* happens to survive independently only in Syriac translation, for the Greek original is known only from the form incorporated into the Christianized Buddhist tale, *Barlaam and Ioasaph*, whose Greek text is attributed to John of Damascus. Though no Greek work with the title 'Hypomnemata which Ambrosios, a chief man of Greece, wrote' (as an *apologia* to his fellow senators) is known, this early Syriac work is in fact just a translation of the *Apology of Pseudo-Justin*. Of more interest is an unduly neglected *Discourse of the philosopher Meliton which took place (or: who was) in the presence of Antoninus Caesar*.<sup>21</sup> This Antoninus has been variously identified as Marcus Aurelius or Caracalla. If it was indeed delivered in the emperor's presence, then this apology too will certainly have been written originally in Greek, but it is also possible that the claim is just a literary fiction, in which case there is a serious possibility that the work was written in Syriac; if so, we would then have another example, alongside the book of *The Laws of the Countries*, of what one might call biculturalism, where a Syriac author takes over a purely Greek literary genre.

A further text which may belong to the earliest period of Syriac literature is a collection of a hundred or so wisdom sayings attributed to Menander the Sage.<sup>22</sup> These have no direct connection with the Greek Menander Sentences. Their origin is uncertain, but they are probably a translation from a lost Greek collection of sayings, and they may originate from Egypt in the early Roman period, where possibly they were the work of a 'God-fearer'.

One final point is worth making. Although surviving Syriac literature is almost entirely of Christian provenance, it is important to remember that Syriac (or a closely related Aramaic dialect) also served as an important literary vehicle for Manichaean literature. Today only some diminutive fragments of Manichaean writings in Syriac survive, but it is very possible that several texts extant in other languages, such as the Greek *Life of Mani*, are translations from

Syriac. It is also quite possible that there was a pagan literature in Syriac, produced largely at Harran, not far from Edessa; of this, however, only a few alleged fragments, attributed to a prophet Baba, survive.<sup>23</sup>

## Notes

- 1 English translations in G. Phillips, *The Doctrine of Addai the Apostle*, and G. Howard, *The Teaching of Addai*. For the background to the work, see S. P. Brock, 'Eusebius and Syriac Christianity', in Attridge and Hata, eds, *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*, 212–34 (repr. in S. P. Brock, *From Ephrem to Romanos. Interactions between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity*, ch. II).
- 2 Notably Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 1971, and H. J. W. Drijvers, 'Facts and Problems in Early Syriac-speaking Christianity', *SecCent* 2 (1982), 157–75 (repr. in his *East of Antioch*, ch. 6).
- 3 Notably F. C. Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity*, ch. I, and H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth*, 39–46, 85–94.
- 4 See Brock, 'Eusebius and Syriac Christianity'.
- 5 A reconstruction is provided by H. J. W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*.
- 6 Text and ET in H. J. W. Drijvers, *The Book of the Laws of Countries*.
- 7 The work is also quoted in the *Clementine Recognitions* 9.19–29, and in Ps.-Caesarius, *Erotapokriseis* 108–9.
- 8 See especially M. P. Weitzman, *From Judaism to Christianity: Studies in the Hebrew and Syriac Bibles*, ch. 1; and in general, S. P. Brock, 'Ancient Versions (Syriac)' in *The Anchor Dictionary of the Bible*, VI (New York and London: Doubleday, 1992), 794–9.
- 9 Thus especially H. J. W. Drijvers.
- 10 See S. P. Brock, 'The Peshitta Old Testament: between Judaism and Christianity', *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 19 (1998), 483–502.
- 11 An excellent guide is provided by Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron*.
- 12 See especially B. M. Metzger, *Early Versions of the New Testament*, ch. 1.
- 13 See J. Joosten, 'Tatian's Diatessaron and the Old Testament Peshitta', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120 (2001), 501–23.
- 14 For Jewish features in early Syriac literature as well as in the Syriac Bible, see S. P. Brock, 'Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979), 212–32 (repr. in *Studies in Syriac Christianity*, ch. IV), and 'Palestinian Targum Feature in Syriac', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 46 (1995), 271–82.
- 15 In the past this has often been associated with Rabbula, bishop of Edessa from 411–36, but the evidence for this is inadequate.
- 16 The best ET is that by J. A. Emerton, in H. F. D. Sparks, *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 683–731. A detailed commentary, by M. Lattke, is in the course of publication (1999–).
- 17 On this ode see H. J. W. Drijvers, 'The 19th Ode of Solomon: its interpretation and place in Syrian Christianity', *JTS* n.s. 31 (1980), 337–55.

- 18 ET by A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*. A good introduction is given by H. J. W. Drijvers, 'Thomasakten', in W. Schneemelcher, ed., *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen* (1997b), 289–303.
- 19 A survey is given by P.-H. Poirier, *L'Hymne de la Perle des Actes de Thomas* (Louvain: Peeters, 1981).
- 20 ET in W. Cureton, *Spicilegium Syriacum* (London: Rivingtons, 1855), 70–6. On this Letter see especially K. E. McVey, 'A Fresh Look at the Letter of Mara bar Sarapion to His Son', V Symposium Syriacum (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 236) (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1990), 257–72.
- 21 ET in Cureton, *Spicilegium Syriacum*, 41–51. For the possible dates, see F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC–AD 337*, 478, with note 21; also I. Ramelli, 'L'apologia siriana di Melitone ad Antonio Cesare', *Vetera Christianorum* 36 (1999), 259–86.
- 22 ET, with good introduction and notes, by T. Baarda in J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, II, 583–606.
- 23 ET in Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity*, ch. VII, 233.

## Ephrem and the Syriac tradition

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Virtually every aspect of Syriac Christianity prior to the fourth century remains obscure, and it is only then that one can feel oneself on firmer ground. This is due not only to the presence of more and better historical sources, but also to the fact that three major bodies of writing in Syriac survive from this century: Aphrahat's twenty-three *Demonstrations*, Ephrem's extensive writings in both prose and (above all) poetry, and the anonymous guide to the spiritual life entitled *The Book of Steps*. The first and third of these were produced within the Sasanian Empire, while Ephrem was writing in the easternmost area of the Roman Empire, first in Nisibis, and then in Edessa. Together, these writings provide us with the best evidence we have for the character of Syriac literary culture at a period when it was still comparatively unhellenized.

Aphrahat 'the Persian Sage' was also known at an early date under the name of Jacob, which soon led to confusion with Jacob, bishop of Nisibis, who died in 338. Aphrahat, however, was definitely writing within the Sasanian Empire, and furthermore his works are exactly dated, for *Demonstrations* 1–10 are given the date 337, while 11–22 belong to 344, and 23 to August 345 (1–22 provide an alphabetic acrostic). The title 'Demonstration' happens to correspond exactly to the Greek ἐπίδειξις, but it is unlikely that the Greek genre has had any direct influence on Aphrahat's writing; he himself also describes his short treatises on occasion as 'Letters'. Their subject-matter is very varied. The first half deals with topics concerning general aspects of the Christian life, such as fasting (1), prayer (4), and the ascetic life (6 and 7). *Demonstration* 6, entitled 'On the members of the covenant (*bnay qyama*)' is of especial interest for the light it sheds on the specifically Mesopotamian developments in the consecrated life prior to the advent of Egyptian-style monasticism: these *bnay qyama*, also called *ihidaye*, lit. 'singles', who were single-minded and celibate followers of Christ the *Ihida*, or 'Only-Begotten', evidently undertook certain ascetic vows (their *qyama*, or covenant, with Christ), probably made at baptism.<sup>1</sup>

The second half of the *Demonstrations* is largely concerned with relations with Judaism. Although on various occasions a 'Jewish debater' is directly addressed, Aphrahat's concern is not so much dialogue with Jews, but rather argumentation with Judaizing Christians who wished to follow various Jewish practices. *Demonstration* 14, however, stands apart, being an attack on ecclesiastical malpractice in high places; unfortunately the historical setting which gave rise to this outburst remains unclear, despite various attempts to elucidate it. *Demonstration* 21 is an important witness to the beginnings of the persecution of Christianity under Shapur II, while the final *Demonstration*, entitled 'On the Grape Cluster in which there is blessing' (Isa. 65:8) provides a fine example of the way in which typology functioned as a vehicle for Christian teaching.

Certain sections, often quite extensive, of the *Demonstrations* are written in artistic prose, with carefully balanced sentences making abundant use of rhetorical features many of which are also to be found in contemporary Greek *Kunstprosa*. Neither Aphrahat, nor any other early Syriac writer (even Ephrem) who employs this kind of artistic prose writing, can possibly have come under the direct influence of Greek *Kunstprosa*, and it is evident that we have two independent manifestations of the same general phenomenon.

By far the most important figure of early Syriac literature is the theologian-poet Ephrem, most of whose life was spent as a deacon serving the church in Nisibis. When, however, that city was ceded to the Persians in the peace treaty of 363, one of the conditions was that the Christian population should leave, and Ephrem in due course settled in Edessa, where he spent the last ten years of his life (he died in 373). Ephrem's writings are extensive even when the large number of works falsely attributed to him is excluded.<sup>2</sup> His fame as 'the harp of the Spirit' rested primarily on his poetry, for which he employed two different metrical forms, the *memra* and the *madrasha*. The *memra*, in Ephrem's hands, consists of seven-syllable couplets, and is suited to subject-matter of a narrative or didactic content. Only a comparatively small number of *memre* under Ephrem's name, however, are definitely by Ephrem; among these will be the six *memre* on Faith, and the *memre* on the destruction, by an earthquake in 359, of Nicomedia, preserved primarily only in Armenian translation. Probably genuine (though doubt has been expressed) is a famous *memra* on the Repentance of Nineveh, which also survives in Greek translation (where it constitutes one of the rather few items in the extensive corpus of 'Ephrem Graecus' for which a Syriac original exists).<sup>3</sup> Less certain is another well-known narrative *memra*, on the Sinful Woman (Luke 7), where the poet introduces the motif – to prove very influential<sup>4</sup> – of the perfume seller from whom the woman buys the unguent with which she anoints Jesus' feet.

Uncertainty also surrounds the authorship of an epic cycle in twelve books on the patriarch Joseph.

The *madrasha*, conventionally translated ‘hymn’, is a stanzaic poem which could be written in a variety of different syllabic metres; it had already been employed as the vehicle for theological teaching by Bardaisan and Mani, and at least part of Ephrem’s very large output in this medium was specifically intended to counter the influence of these, and other (to him) heretical writers. Ephrem handles the medium with consummate artistry, deftly moving from one striking image to another; he employs a little over forty-five different stanza patterns which could range from the regular and simple (e.g. four lines each of five syllables) to the highly complex. These stanza patterns are identified by their *qale*, or melodies to which they were evidently sung (a single metrical pattern might in fact be known by the names of two or three different *qale*).

Ephrem’s *madrashe* come down to us in a small number of fifth- and sixth-century manuscripts (which alone preserve them in an unabbreviated form), and here they are collected together into cycles of various sizes, whose titles do not always give a clear idea of the contents. Thus while the largest cycle (On Faith, 87 *madrashe*) and the small one of fifteen *madrashe* On Paradise are indeed on these topics (the former being largely aimed against later forms of Arianism), the titles of the cycles On the Church and On Virginity (both 52 *madrashe*) give a very inadequate idea of the subjects covered. Even in the case of the volume of *madrashe* on Nisibis (77 *madrashe*, often called the *Carmina Nisibena*), it is only the first half that concerns Nisibis, the second half being devoted largely to the theme of the Descent into Sheol. Among these *madrashe* on the Descent is a small group (52–4) which are in the form of dialogues between Death and Satan, where in alternating stanzas each boasts that he has the greater power over humanity: only to discover in the concluding stanza(s) that the power of them both has been nullified by Christ at his descent into Sheol. Ephrem here adapts to the new context of Christian teaching the ancient Mesopotamian literary genre of the precedence dispute, examples of which are found in both Sumerian and Akkadian.<sup>5</sup> The genre has in fact continued in use – in a variety of different languages – up to the present day in the Middle East; more or less contemporary with Ephrem, the genre is also attested in Jewish Aramaic and in Middle Persian. In Syriac after Ephrem’s day it continued to enjoy great popularity, and some fifty or so dialogue poems, mostly anonymous, survive (see further below).

Over 400 *madrashe* by Ephrem survive, a certain number of these in damaged form. From a sixth-century index of the *qale* to his *madrashe* we learn of nine

'volumes' of his *madrashe*, several of the titles of which conform to those of the surviving hymn-cycles; others, however, are unknown, and in the case of some the number of *madrashe* that the index gives is very much larger than that of the cycle(s) we know. It is thus clear that a considerable number of *madrashe* have been lost. Furthermore, in certain of the cycles that do survive there are *madrashe* which must be later than Ephrem's time: this applies in particular to the *madrashe* on Epiphany, and those on the ascetics Julian Saba (the Elder) and Abraham of Qidun.

It is primarily from the *madrashe* that Ephrem's profound theological vision can best be perceived. That he should have chosen poetry, rather than prose, as the vehicle to express this is in itself significant, for to him the best tool of theological language is the paradox, where two poles are held in dynamic tension. Using this, he describes both the divine descent, where God 'puts on', first human language (where he allows himself to be described in the Old Testament) and then the human body, and the possibility opened up by this descent of humanity's ascent to God, using as a ladder the *raze* or 'symbols' (lit. 'mysteries') inherent in both Scripture and Nature, which serve as pointers to the divine reality, or truth, and at the same time indicate the interrelatedness of everything and everyone.<sup>6</sup>

Ephrem's prose works fall into three categories, the *Prose Refutations*, the commentaries, and works written in artistic prose. The *Prose Refutations* is a modern title given to a group of polemical works directed against the teaching of Marcion, Bardaisan and Mani. In these works (and indeed elsewhere) Ephrem shows an awareness of some of the general philosophical issues current among educated Christians writing in Greek,<sup>7</sup> though it is unclear whether he himself was able to read Greek directly: certainly there is no firm evidence that he could.

A number of biblical commentaries have a strong claim either to be by Ephrem himself, or to represent his teaching or that of his immediate followers. These include two Old Testament commentaries, on Genesis and on Exodus (the latter is incomplete), which are of particular interest for the many parallels with Jewish exegetical tradition. The coverage of the two biblical books is very uneven: in the Commentary on Genesis, over a third of the work is devoted to the first four chapters of Genesis, and of the later chapters, only the Blessings of Jacob (Gen. 49) are commented on in any detail. Though a specifically Christian exegesis of certain passages is occasionally found, this is not a regular feature of the commentaries.

Two of the three New Testament commentaries, on Acts, and on the Pauline Epistles, are preserved only in an early Armenian translation, while the third,

on the *Diatessaron*, survives complete only in that language, though in recent years quite a large proportion of the Syriac original has come to light. The Commentary on the *Diatessaron*, or 'Commentary on the Concordant Gospel' as the Armenian title has it (the Syriac is lost), is of particular interest and importance, both as a unique early witness to the text of the Syriac *Diatessaron*, and as an extensive source for knowledge of early Syriac exegesis of the Gospels. The Commentary is in fact curiously uneven in character for, while some passages are in an almost lyrical style verging on artistic prose (notably parts of 21, on the death and resurrection of Jesus), others give the impression of being little more than notes, listing a number of different possible interpretations.

In all the biblical commentaries the normal process is to provide a lemma, consisting of part of a verse, or a whole verse, followed by an exposition. Though the sequence of the biblical text is followed, only a limited number of verses are selected for comment. The exegesis of these commentaries under Ephrem's name is very varied in character, and his approach may be historical or completely ahistorical (the Commentary on Genesis describes these two poles as 'factual' and 'spiritual'). As in the *madrashé* his prime concern is to discern the 'hidden power (or meaning)' behind the words of the biblical text.

Besides the Commentary on the *Diatessaron*, another work entitled 'The Exposition of the Gospel', surviving only in Armenian translation, is also attributed to Ephrem, but in this case the work, though early, is from very different circles.<sup>8</sup>

Two works by Ephrem are written largely in artistic prose: *The Discourse on our Lord*, and the letter addressed to a certain Publius. The former could be described as a doctrinal meditation on various aspects of the life of Christ, while the Letter to Publius, of which only excerpts survive, consists in an extended meditation on the Last Judgment and the nature of Gehenna (which is understood essentially in psychological terms, as an awareness of separation from God).

As is certainly the case with Ephrem's poetry, it is also likely that several of Ephrem's prose works have been lost, and among these will be the work on the Holy Spirit, which Jerome – writing just under twenty years after Ephrem's death – read and admired in translation (*Vir. Ill.* 115).<sup>9</sup>

The name of the third major Syriac author of the fourth century is unknown, but a chance reference indicates that he was probably writing within the Persian Empire. The anonymous *Book of Steps*,<sup>10</sup> written in thirty chapters, could be described as a manual of the Christian life. Running through the work is the distinction between the lesser and the greater commandments of the Gospels: the former are summed up in the Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12 and



Luke 6:31, while the latter involve a complete renunciation of family, marriage and property. The work has a number of features in common with the Greek Macarian Homilies, now known to be of Mesopotamian rather than Egyptian origin, but there is no evidence of any direct literary relationship. The *Book of Steps* has been variously dated, but on the whole somewhere around 400 would seem the most plausible.

The fifth century was to witness a major change in the character of Syriac literature, as it came more and more under the influence of the Greek-speaking world. Furthermore, the Christological controversies produced a three-way split in ecclesiastical allegiance among Syriac speakers: a minority accepted the Council of Chalcedon, while the remainder rejected either that council (thus the West Syriac, or Syrian Orthodox tradition), or the Council of Ephesus (thus the East Syriac tradition of the Church of the East). The effects of these divisions, however, fall largely beyond the bounds of this chapter.

In the early decades of the fifth century, Syriac literature, above all Syriac poetry, still retained a considerable prestige in the Greek-speaking world. It is in fact quite likely that the Syriac poetic form of the *madrasha* served, at least in part, as a model for the development in Greek of the new verse form of the *kontakion*.<sup>11</sup> In any case, one can see from a fragment of Theodore of Mopsuestia that Syriac liturgical poetry must have enjoyed a considerable vogue since both Flavian bishop of Antioch and Diodore bishop of Tarsus had Syriac antiphonal hymns translated into Greek.<sup>12</sup> Syriac hagiography also had an appeal outside a purely Syriac readership, and at least two anonymous *Lives*, of the Man of God (later known as Alexis) and of Abraham of Qidun, were translated in the fifth century into Greek (and thence into Latin, where both proved very influential in the Western Middle Ages).<sup>13</sup> Also translated into Greek were some of the *Acts* of the Persian martyrs who had suffered in the mid-fourth century under Shapur II.<sup>14</sup> A considerable number of martyr *Acts*, of very varying character and historical value, had grown up, probably for the most part in the course of the fifth century, focused on this extensive persecution, whose first victim had been the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Simeon bar Sabba'e, martyred in 344 (rather than 341, which has also been claimed).

Although the level of brilliance and profundity achieved by Ephrem's poetry was never again equalled, verse continued to be an important medium for theological writing in the fifth century. Although the names of a few poets, such as Balai and Cyrillona from the beginning of the century, and especially Narsai and Jacob of Serugh from the end, are known, much poetry from this period is anonymous. This applies to writing on biblical topics in two genres

in particular, the dramatic dialogue poem, and the narrative poem. Ephrem had been the pioneer in both these verse forms, but the majority of surviving texts employing them are probably the work of anonymous poets of the fifth century. The dialogue poems (a few of which still remain vestigially in liturgical use) provide the author with an opportunity to explore, through an externalized dialogue, the psychological tensions implicit in particular biblical passages (often just a single verse).<sup>15</sup> Thus the dialogue between Joseph and Mary takes as its starting point Matthew 1:18, and Joseph's discovery of his fiancée's pregnancy.<sup>16</sup> The dialogue, formalized into alternating stanzas, combines realism with both insight and, at times, gentle humour. For the most part the surviving dialogue poems are based on biblical sources, though a few introduce persons absent from the relevant biblical text, such as Satan, who is represented as arguing with the Sinful Woman of Luke 7.<sup>17</sup> In a few cases the disputants are personifications; this applies to a dispute between the months,<sup>18</sup> a poem which excellently illustrates the three different components that are to be found, in varying combinations and proportions, in early Syriac literature: the genre is ancient Mesopotamian, the topic has very close parallels in Jewish Aramaic, where there are a number of poems in which the months dispute over who is to have the honour of the Exodus, and the treatment owes something to the Greek tradition of *ekphrasis*.

The number of anonymous narrative poems on biblical topics is not large, but these include some remarkable treatments. Perhaps none is more dramatic than the second of two poems (in seven-syllable couplets) on Abraham and Isaac (Gen. 22):<sup>19</sup> although the biblical narrative makes no mention at all of Sarah, it is she, and not Abraham or Isaac, who emerges as the true heroine, for she has endured, not the single trial that Abraham had experienced, but a double one, the second imposed on her by her husband on his return, when at first he does not disclose that he has brought their son back with him. The author of this extraordinary poem (who conceivably could have been a woman) draws on the distinctive earlier Syriac interpretation of this episode, according to which Sarah was aware of Abraham's intent in taking off their child, but develops this in a way that is without parallel in patristic literature. Another interesting feature of this poem, and others in this genre, lies in various parallels, some quite striking, with rabbinic exegetical homilies. Any direct literary dependency is out of the question, and the presence of these parallels is best explained by seeing both the Syriac poems and the rabbinic homilies as sharing the characteristics of traditional narrative *aggada*, the former expressed in verse, the latter in prose. Interestingly enough, these narrative poems also share some features with Christian Greek writing: as far

as the verse form is concerned one can compare the (otherwise very different) versifications of biblical narrative by Eudocia, Apollinaris and others; much closer, as far as content and the treatment of the biblical episodes is concerned, are the homilies of writers like Basil of Seleucia and others.

Towards the end of the fifth century two prolific poets, Narsai (d. c. 500) in the East Syriac tradition, and Jacob of Serugh (d. 521) in the West Syriac, adapt the narrative poem into a specifically homiletic context, producing the characteristically Syriac genre of the verse homily. Although biblical topics and passages form the standard subject-matter, these verse homilies can also turn to hagiography (in Jacob's case) and liturgy, the latter exemplified most notably in Narsai's verse commentaries on the baptismal and eucharistic liturgies.<sup>20</sup> It is symptomatic of the growing influence of Greek writing that both these poets show the marked influence of Theodore of Mopsuestia's exegesis. In the case of Narsai this is not a matter for surprise, since he belonged to the strongly dyophysite Antiochene Christological tradition which, as far as the Syriac Church of the East was concerned, was largely based on Theodore's writings. Jacob, however, belonged to the opposite end of the Christological spectrum, and so the influence of Theodore demands explanation. The answer is to be found in Jacob's education at the Persian School in Edessa,<sup>21</sup> where Theodore's biblical commentaries were standard fare; although Jacob (and Philoxenus, another alumnus of that school) rebelled against its Christological teaching, Theodore none the less left his mark on them in matters of biblical exegesis.

As the fifth century advanced the theological and literary agenda of Greek-speaking Christianity grew increasingly influential among Syriac writers, and by the end of the century such was the prestige of Greek that Philoxenus (d. 523), who happens to be one of the finest models of Syriac prose style, considered the Greek Bible as superior in authority to the Syriac. This growing influence of Greek literary culture can be seen in a variety of different ways: thus, for example, the specifically Greek literary form of the philosophical dialogue has been taken over into Syriac for the purpose of discussions on the spiritual life by John of Apamea, a little-known, but important and influential, writer of the first half of the fifth century. Again, Greek rhetorical features such as *ethopoiia* can be found in both prose and verse homilies. Likewise, phraseology from, and exegetical tradition based on, the Greek rather than the Syriac Bible come into currency: thus the 'Ancient of Days' in Ephrem is the Father, in conformity with the Peshitta text of Daniel 7:13, but in fifth-century poetry the Ancient of Days is often identified as the Son, which goes back to an influential reading in the Old Greek text of Daniel.

The ever-increasing prestige of Greek can also be seen in the history of translations made from Greek into Syriac. Over the course of the fourth to the seventh centuries an astonishingly large number of translations, mainly of Greek patristic texts, was made, and in several cases the Syriac translation is now the sole witness to a work, the Greek original having been lost. The pattern of translation technique evidenced by the transition from the Old Syriac to the Peshitta Gospel translation,<sup>22</sup> where an original rather free rendering is brought into closer line with the Greek original, reflects the pattern found in most non-biblical translations as well: here early translations (fourth- and fifth-century) are very much reader-oriented and can sometimes be better described as free re-creations rather than straight translations, while later ones, of the sixth and above all seventh centuries, become more and more oriented to the source text, and increasingly the aim of the translator was to provide as close a mirror reflection of the original as possible.<sup>23</sup> In the sphere of biblical translation the culmination of this process can be seen in the revision of the earlier (lost) Philoxenian revision of the Peshitta New Testament by Thomas of Harkel, made outside Alexandria c. 616, and in its companion translation, the *Syrohexapla*, made from Origen's revised text of the Septuagint. In fourth- and fifth-century translations, however, this essentially philological approach is absent. Among the first non-biblical translations into Syriac must have been the *Clementine Recognitions*, Titus of Bostra's work against the Manichaeans, and Eusebius' *Theophaneia* and *Palestinian Martyrs*, for all these are preserved in the earliest dated Syriac literary manuscript, copied in Edessa in November 411. The translators of these particular works, while regularly opting for dynamic as opposed to formal equivalence, nevertheless adhered reasonably closely to the Greek original. This is not, however, the case with some other, probably early fifth-century, translations, such as Athanasius' *Life of Antony* and certain of Basil of Caesarea's works, where the Syriac version ranges between an expanded paraphrase to (at least in parts) a re-creation of the original. Thus, while these translations are often of disappointingly little use as exceptionally early witnesses to the Greek text, nevertheless they offer many insights into the way that Greek literary culture was adapted and received into Syriac Christianity.

As was mentioned in passing earlier, early Syriac literature can be said to have reflected the influence of three different literary cultures, Mesopotamian, Jewish and Greek. The first of these can most clearly be seen in the adaptation of the ancient genre of the precedence dispute, and in some of the poetic imagery employed (a notable example being the phrase 'medicine of life', common in Ephrem and elsewhere); direct links with earlier Aramaic literature, however, seem to be very few, and beside the case of the portions of Ezra and Daniel in

biblical Aramaic, the only example is the story of Ahiqar, whose various Syriac forms have their ultimate roots in the Aramaic tale of the Achaemenid period, of which fragments survive from Elephantine in southern Egypt. Elements of Jewish origin are much more prominent, of course. Here it is not just due to the taking over into Syriac of the Hebrew Bible, for many Jewish elements which are not of biblical origin can be found, above all in the fourth-century writers Aphrahat and Ephrem; these may take the form of terminology and phraseology characteristic of Jewish Aramaic literature, especially the Targums, or of Jewish exegetical traditions which have been adapted to Christian use.<sup>24</sup> The Greek element was already the most prominent in the case of Bardaisan and his school, for there we seem to be in the presence of a group (no doubt small) of people who were genuinely bicultural. However, although it is hard to be certain owing to the paucity of Syriac texts from the third century, it would seem likely that the *Acts of Thomas* was a more typical product of that century than the *Book of the Laws of the Countries*. In the *Acts of Thomas*, as in the three major fourth-century writers, while the influence of Greek literary culture is by no means wholly absent, it has not yet begun to become pervasive, as was to prove more and more to be the case as Syriac literature was to develop in the fifth and, above all, in the succeeding two centuries. It is for this reason that a particular interest surrounds Syriac writers of the third and fourth centuries, quite apart from the fact that one of them was certainly the finest poet of early Christianity to write in any language.

#### Notes

- 1 Cf. S. Griffith, 'Asceticism in the Church of Syria. The hermeneutics of early Syrian monasticism', in W. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis, eds, *Asceticism*, 220–48.
- 2 Cf. S. P. Brock, 'A Brief Guide to the Main Editions and Translations of the Works of St Ephrem'.
- 3 See S. P. Brock, 'Ephrem's Verse Homily on Jonah and the Repentance of Nineveh', in A. Schoors and P. van Deun, eds, *Polyhistor: Miscellanea in honorem C. Laga*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 60 (Louvain: Peeters, 1994), 71–86 (repr. in *From Ephrem to Romanos*, ch. V). The best guide to the large corpus of Greek texts under Ephrem's name is M. Geerard, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, II and Supplement.
- 4 See A. C. Mahr, *Relations of Passion Plays to St Ephrem the Syrian*, Ohio State University, Contributions in Languages and Literature 9 (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1942).
- 5 See R. Murray, 'Aramaic and Syriac Dispute Poems and Their Connections', in M. J. Geller, J. C. Greenfield and M. P. Weitzman, eds, *Studia Aramaica* (*Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement* 4) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 157–87.

- 6 See especially R. Murray, 'The Theory of Symbolism in St Ephrem's Theology', *Parole de l'Orient* 6/7 (1975/6), 1–20.
- 7 See U. Possekel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian*.
- 8 ET by G. A. Egan, Saint Ephrem, *An Exposition of the Gospel*, CSCO 292, Scriptores Armeni 6 (1968). On this work see D. Bundy, 'An Anti-Marcionite Commentary on the Lucan Parables (Pseudo-Ephrem A)', *Le Muséon* 103 (1990), 111–23.
- 9 For the later (misleading) portrait of Ephrem, see J. Amar, 'Byzantine Ascetic Monachism and Greek Bias in the Vita Tradition of Ephrem the Syrian', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 58 (1992), 123–56.
- 10 Ed. with Latin translation by M. Kmosko in *Patrologia Syriaca*, III (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1926). An ET by R. A. Kitchen is to be published in 2004; two chapters are included in S. P. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*.
- 11 See S. P. Brock, 'From Ephrem to Romanos', in E. A. Livingstone, ed., *SP* 20 (1989), 139–51 (repr. in *From Ephrem to Romanos*, ch. IV).
- 12 PG 139, 1390C.
- 13 Cf. M. Schmidt, 'Influence de saint Ephrem sur la littérature latine et allemande du début du moyen-âge', *Parole de l'Orient* 4 (1973), 325–41.
- 14 Ed. with French translation by H. Delehay in *PO* 2.4 (1905).
- 15 A summary survey is given in S. P. Brock, 'Syriac Dispute Poems: the Various Types', in G. J. Reinink and H. L. J. Vanstiphout, eds, *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 42 (Louvain: Peeters, 1991), 109–19 (repr. in *From Ephrem to Romanos*, ch. VII).
- 16 ET in S. P. Brock, *Bride of Light. Hymns on Mary from the Syriac Churches*, 118–24.
- 17 Ed. with ET by S. P. Brock, 'The Sinful Woman and Satan. Two Syriac dialogue poems', *Oriens Christianus* 72 (1988), 21–62, esp. 43–54.
- 18 Ed. with ET by S. P. Brock, 'A Dispute of the Months and Some Related Syriac Texts', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 30 (1985), 181–211 (repr. in *From Ephrem to Romanos*, ch. VIII).
- 19 Ed. with ET by S. P. Brock, 'Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac', *Le Muséon* 99 (1986), 61–129, esp. 122–9 (repr. in *From Ephrem to Romanos*, ch. VI).
- 20 ET by R. H. Connolly, *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*.
- 21 Cf. A. Vööbus, *The School of Nisibis*, 7–32, and H. J. W. Drijvers, 'The School of Edessa: Greek learning and local culture', in J. W. Drijvers and A. A. MacDonald, eds, *Centres of Learning. Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 49–59.
- 22 See ch. 15.
- 23 See S. P. Brock, 'Towards a History of Syriac Translation Technique', in R. Lavenant, ed., *III<sup>e</sup> Symposium Syriacum*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 221 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1983), 1–4 (repr. in *Studies in Syriac Christianity*, X).
- 24 See note 14 to ch. 15.

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## Part III. Foundation of a new culture: from Diocletian to Cyril

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